

BERENICE – BARENTS LIBRARY NETWORK FOR EUROPEAN DIMENSION A PRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT: Co-operation between libraries in the Barents Region has now stepped into a new era: Berenice Centre has initiated its activities. Funding from the European Union Interreg II-programme together with national funding from Sweden and Finland made it possible. The total amount is about 3,5 million Finnish marks and this project will last until the end of June 1999.

The Barents Region's library system is distinctive in Europe in that it is a comprehensive network providing universal access to information and culture. This library system includes all types of libraries from the very smallest village libraries to university libraries, from special libraries to central national libraries. Every person regardless of social, economic or educational status may use all the services free of charge in any library. Each library functions as a node in the open information network.

The Berenice Centre was founded in the Barents Region to study differing attitudes to information, how library status and practices differ and how the perception of an informed society and its implementation differ in countries of European Union and its neighbors. The aim of augmented cooperation within the Barents region is to increase the availability of information. The task of the Berenice project is to assemble and distribute information about libraries and information services, expand the use of modern technology, develop the functions of libraries and ensure continuing education. Berenice may then function as a model for other library and information technologies within other European regions.

The main idea is to build up networks to connect Barents regions librarians across all the different boundaries in the area: the border between East and West, national borders, European

Union boundaries, language barriers, diverse cultures, economic and administrative diversity. Networks will be built to connect also librarians from other remote regions in Europe with Barents librarians.

The research focus will be libraries and information services, with particular emphasis on the application of multimedia and telematic resources. Experimental projects will be designed to enhance library and information services. The emphasis of the activities is on four different areas:

- continuing education and research related with libraries (incl. Barents Library School)
- Sami and other cultural minorities (e.g. a common bibliography)
- collection work, especially sounds and pictures
- boarder-crossing co-operation within IT

Berenice acts like an umbrella over these four areas which are divided into smaller projects. Berenice as an umbrella will also try to convene all related library projects in Barents area. The European dimension of Berenice will mostly be seen in the functioning by Barents Library School. It is planned that these special further education courses would be open to interested librarians in other remote areas in Europe.

Berenice coordinators are working with their own areas of responsibility. One coordinator will work for Sami I Jokkmokk, Sweden. The others work in their own countries Sweden and Finland. A steering group consists of members from Sweden, Finland and Sami. The Administrative Committee of the Barents Interreg II-programme supervises the whole project. The vision is for the Berenice - Barents' library network to continue its operations at the close of the project.

Berenice or Barents Library Network for European Dimension is a co-operation between libraries in the Barents region, the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. All types of libraries are represented in Berenice; small village libraries, university libraries, special libraries and central national libraries.

Founding from the European Union Interreg II-programme in 1997 together with national founding from Sweden and Finland made it possible to start projects. The total amount is 3.5 million Finnish marks and the projects last until the end of June 1999. Berenice's organisation consists of a leading group who gives directions and three co-ordinators who are responsible for the implements. The ordinary members of the leading group come

from Sweden and Finland, the financing countries. Heli Saarinen, chief of Lapland Provincial Library in Rovaniemi in Finland is chairman during this period.

The name Berenice is significant

The name Berenice is chosen with great care. It associates with the starry sky above the Barents area, with the star flag of European Union and with the antique library in Alexandria. Queen Berenice lived 200 years before Christ and was married to Ptolemaios III of Egypt. She offered her beautiful hair to secure her husband's fortune of war. Erasthones, the chief librarian in Alexandria, named one of the constellations in the northern starry sky Berenices hair, *Coma Berenices*. In the projects Berenice's hair symbolises all those links of contact and co-operation that will be built within and outside of the Barents area.

The aims of Berenice

Building networks across the borders to increase the availability of information is the main purpose. Mostly the borders, linguistic, cultural, national or institutional, are stimulating and give new prospects but one should not neglect that there are many obstructions. The aim is also to strengthen separate libraries, attend to different groups, especially minority groups in need of service and information, expand the use of modern technology and ensure continuing education.

As a part of a greater whole the European dimension is important. The library systems in the northern parts of Europe are already known as accessible, professional and diverse. Berenice wants to create useful models and emphasize the importance of having versatile libraries also on local levels.

The four sub-projects given priority

Berenice is an organisation for co-operation but at the same time an umbrella for different library projects. The above-mentioned resources are awarded to start and run the following sub-projects.

1. Barents Library School - BLS

Research and education are the basis for developing libraries. Berenice's head co-ordinator, Merja Rostila in Rovaniemi in Finland, is responsible for the first Barents Library School. The theme is small libraries and librarians in the Barents area are the target group. The participants are recruited from Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia and the very first course will be held in Arkhangelsk in Russia in September 1998. Local librarians from Arkhangelsk are also invited to take part. There are two main reasons to run the course in Russia; it makes it easier for the Russian participants to take part but it also gives the visitors inside information about the Russian culture and library system.

In March 1999 the participants will meet again for a continuing week in Rovaniemi in Finland. Between the two weeks of education they will make small studies on specific subjects. The final meeting will be in May 1999 when the North Calotte Conference is held in Mo i Rana in Norway.

The second BLS course is planned to start in Spring 2000 and last until 2001 and when it goes on the third BLS course will be planned and carried out during the years 2002-2003.

2. The North Calotte in Sound and Images - NCSI

In Barents area there are many collections of sounds and images which are important historical and cultural sources but until now not easy of access. The purpose of this subproject is to draw attention to these collections and make some of them more available by new technology. Berenice has chosen to start with Ragnar Lassinatti's collection in Luleå in Sweden and with the joik collection in Tromsø in Norway.

The work with the joik collection in Tromsø Museum is planned by the University Library of Tromsø. The joiks are special traditional songs made by Sami people and the collection will be digitized according to the plan that will be presented later this year, 1998.

Ragnar Lassinatti was a well-known county governor in the northernmost part of Sweden. During his lifetime he made lots of radio programmes about the history and culture of the North Calotte. The programmes are now kept in Luleå University Library and since the Swedish Broadcasting has the copyright they are involved in this Berenice subproject as well. The working plan for Lassinatti's collection will also be presented later this year.

3. The Sami Bibliography -SB

The Sami bibliography subproject has started with building up a network of Sami institutions and librarians in Russia and in the Nordic countries. A reference group with members from each country is established by Anna Prakhova, the Sami co-ordinator in Jokkmokk in Sweden. She has also taken part in conferences and visited authorities with Sami connections to establish necessary contacts.

The Nordic countries have bibliographies of Sami literature, but they are not complete. They are also composed differently and there is a need of a common interface to make it possible to search from all the catalogues at the same time. This problem will probably be solved during the present financing period which lasts until July 1999. The next step is to get the Sami literature from Russia catalogued and put into the same interface. A survey of Russian Sami issues has begun and will continue during the whole period. This second step takes a lot of time to carry out and the Sami co-ordinator has to seek for continuing sources of finance.

4. The Tornio Valley Library Network- Bridging the Borders by IT –BBIT

The border between Sweden and Finland passes through the Tornio Valley. In this valley there are four Swedish and six Finish municipalities on each side of the border and in each municipality there is at least one public library. The Finish and Swedish languages are not related at all but in this special area the language and the culture are originally the same. That is the base for building up this library network.

The Swedish co-ordinator, Margareta Raattamaa in Övertorneå in Sweden, has as her main task to implement the idea of Tornio Valley Library network. The libraries along the border have like most small libraries only one educated librarian who often has to fight for grants to survive and there is not much time for development work.. By networking the librarians can get support, information and knowledge and a chance to discuss professional matters.

The plan for this subproject is complete, the work has started and the participants take part with great interest. The idea of networking is not new but there has never been time to practise it.

When the small local net functions like a natural platform it is time to take further contacts and gradually realize the vision and the symbol of Berenices hair.

Continuous information about Berenice

Berenice's homepage [www.urova.fi/home/arktinen/berenice/] has frequent information about Berenice and its projects. The evaluation of the projects will also be presented and the plans for the future will be based on these experiences.

